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CAVE PAINTINGS NEAR YORK AND HYDEN

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During the period June 6 to June 12, 1952, accompanied by Mrs. B. and Mr. A. Main, I visited a number of caves in the York and Hyden districts of Western Australia. The following notes indicate the extent of the native paintings in the caves visited, with some historical information on the same subject.

GWAMBYGINE CAVE

This is at Cave Hill, Gwambygine, 5 miles south of York, on the property of Mrs. F. Clifton and was discovered early in the history of the State. The first published reference seems to have been that by Ensign R. Dale of the 63rd Regiment (*Journals of several expeditions made in Western Australia during the years 1829, 1830, 1831 and 1832, 1833*). In a chapter referring to an expedition to the "Eastward of the Darling Mountains", in August, 1831, p. 57, Dale states:

"At this spot we heard the natives, whose traces we had been following this morning, hailing each other at a great distance: we were fortunate enough this night in finding shelter from the rain, which was pouring down in torrents, under a sheltering rock; it was of a considerable size, having the shape and appearance of a thatched roof of a cottage. In the neighbourhood of our bivouac, and for some distance around were large masses of granite; in one of them we discovered a cavern, the interior being arched and resembling somewhat in appearance an ancient ruin. On one side was rudely carved what was evidently intended to represent an image of the sun, it being a circular figure about eighteen inches in diameter, emitting rays from its left side, and having without the circle, lines meeting each other at right angles; close to this representation of the sun were an impression of an arm and several hands. This spot appeared to be used by the natives as a place of worship."

George Fletcher Moore also gives the following description (*Diary of Ten Years of an Early Settler in Western Australia, 1884, p. 73*): ". . . its extreme end is a round figure, supposed to represent the sun, with the impressions of open hands around it. It appeared to us as if the rock had been covered with reddish

pigment, and that the impressions had been formed by the friction of a stone on the rock. . . . This cave is supposed to have been a place of worship; yet I know not why as the natives do not appear to have an object of veneration, nor is there any indications of a path leading to it."

He further discusses the subject (*A Descriptive Vocabulary of the Language in Common Use among the Aborigines of Western Australia*, 1842, p. 35): "Dumbun. subst.—a cave. The only vestige of antiquity of art which has yet been discovered, consists of a circular figure rudely cut out or carved into the face of a rock, in a cavern near York, with several impressions of open hands found in the stone around it. The natives can give no rational account of this. They tell some fables of the moon having visited the cave and executed the work. They have little curiosity regarding it and pay it no respect in any way. In short, it appears as if it did not concern them or belong to their people."

Writing under the pen name of "Polygon", P. Hasluck (*The West Australian*, August 30, 1930) wrote:

"There are no signs today of the rays that Dale described outside the circle. The most perfect specimen among the drawings is a left forearm and hand low down on the wall below the circle. This was outlined on the rock in red. It may have been done, as Moore suggests, by preparing a background of red and then rubbing away the colour with a stone to form the picture. Apparently the artist placed his hand and arm on the wall as he worked and stencilled the shape. To the left of the circle are two perfect imprints of left hands. These are done differently. The picture is not made by scraping away the colour or leaving the original rock bare, but by applying the colour in the shape of the picture and leaving the rock as the background. The hand is red, as though, as the old fable said, hands dipped in blood had left their marks. Other fainter and damaged drawings of hands are here and there. At one time the circle may have been surrounded by them."

No additional particulars on the cave or the drawings are given by D. S. Davidson in his "Aboriginal Australian and Tasmanian Rock Carvings and Paintings" (*Mcm. Amer. Philosophical Soc.*, 1936, vol. 5, p. 120).

Mrs. Clifton informed us that from the information she had been given it appeared that the natives were nervous of the area and regarded it as the home of a Jingee Jingee or devil.

The cave faces to the east and is a typical hollow weathered in the granite. In depth it is no more than four or five feet, about 10 feet high and 40 feet long. At the south end is a small recess and in this are the paintings. Possibly other native work on the west and north walls has been removed by weathering. Although a few similar depressions were examined none were found to contain paintings. On the roof of the cave were fairly fresh nests of the Fairy Martin (*Hylochelidon ariel*). Apparently this is a well known haunt of the bird as this cave is recorded as a nesting



Fig. 1.—Gwambygine Cave. The “sun” of Ensign Dale’s account. The thick white lines make the design, on a background of red.

—Photos V. N. Serventy.

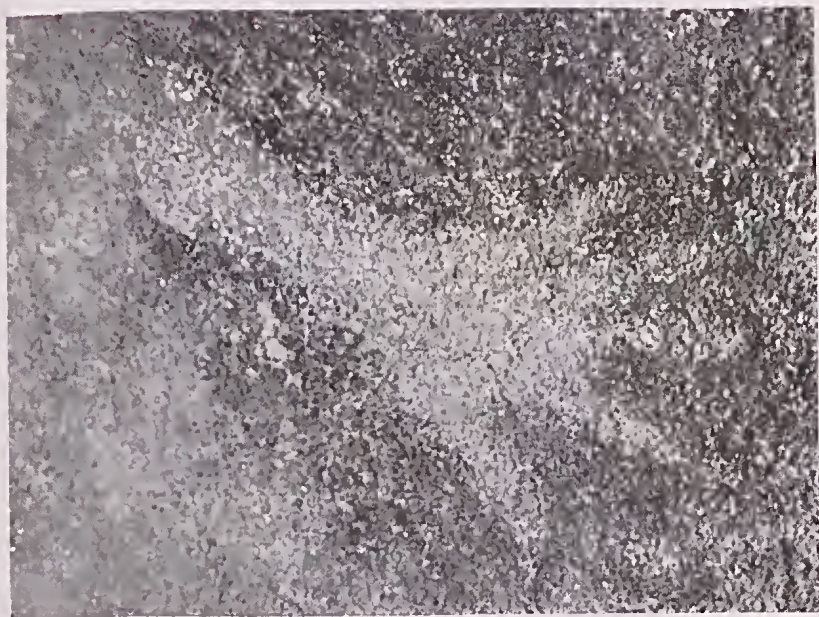


Fig. 2.—Gwambygine Cave. The hand and forearm on the wall.

area by D. L. Serventy and H. M. Whittell (*A Handbook of the Birds of Western Australia*, 1951, p. 259).

Turning to the paintings themselves the central figure is as described by Hasluck. No trace of the rays mentioned by Dale can be seen. Also possibly Dale has written the word "without" as a mistake for "within" when referring to the lines meeting at right angles. This design is almost a perfect circle of 17 inches diameter, and is illustrated in Fig. 1. The circumference and cross lines are done with white paint and ochre is used in between. There is no carving. Surrounding the circle are stencilled hands. The most remarkable of these is a wrist as well as hand, the whole being over 11 inches long. It is about two feet above the floor of the cave and is of the stencil type. The natural rock gives the hand shape while around is the red ochre outlining it. The colour is still fairly bright and was either applied by blowing paint from the mouth while the hand was held in position, or else a brush made of bark or frayed out twig used as a tool to apply the paint. The neatness of the outline would seem to indicate the blowing method. Above this comes the circle some four feet from the floor and then above the circle are two hands, which may be stencils but are possibly done by dipping the hand in ochre and pressing on the wall, a printing method. In other words the palm and fingers, instead of being natural rock are red in colour. Both these hands are much fainter than the previous stencilled type. Further to the right are faint marks which may be other hands, while along the base is what appears to be a strip of faintly coloured rock and which may represent remnants of some drawings. The right or northern section is more exposed to the weather.

HYDEN ROCKS.

Hyden, about 160 miles E.S.E. from Perth, is at the terminal of the railway line from Wagin, via Lake Grace. The Hyden Rocks lie about two miles east of the town and are a popular picnic resort. The only traces of native work found were some very faint hands in two caves just below the dam and near the picnic area. Both were in boulders, separate from the main rock mass. The east end was hollowed out in both cases to make a small cave some five feet high. Two left hands were found in one cave and in the cave to the north of this, five left hands and three right hands. In both caves there were suggestions of markings indicating other hands but these were not definite enough to make identification certain. Apparently little is known locally about the paintings since there is no defacing. The casual observer would miss the significance of the very faint markings.

Near the east end of the Hyden Rocks is a very large cave. The opening is about 20 feet high and the cave is about 36 feet deep with a width of approximately 24 feet. It is also near a picnic ground and quite recently the walls have been whitewashed. There is a suggestion of ochre markings just above the whitewash but nothing definite could be recognised.

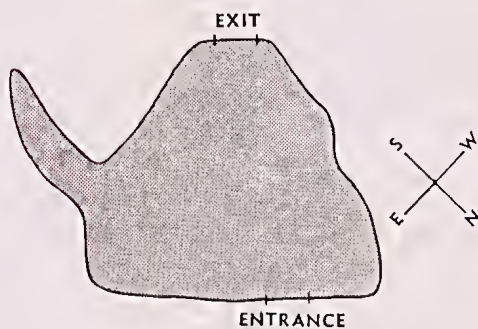
THE HUMPS.

This feature is situated about 8 miles N.E. of Hyden. Locally the rock formation is known as The Humps and is officially Government Reserve 4672. R. B. Day of Kulin describes one cave in the following words (*The West Australian*, January 27, 1951):

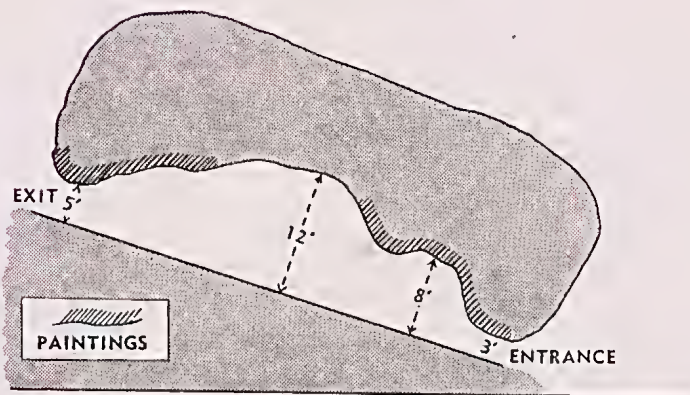
"The Humps is a great, bluff, granite outcrop, which towers over the surrounding countryside to a height of several hundred feet, and covers perhaps 90 acres. Its name is derived from the fact that at certain angles from the distance it resembles the



FRONT ELEVATION



PLAN OF CAVE



SECTION OF CAVE

Fig. 3.—The Cave at the Humps, near Hyden.

back of a camel. These great granite outcrops are typical of the inland of Western Australia, and as water is generally to be found on, or near them, explorers and adventurous prospectors of the early days used them as staging camps in their journeys of exploration. Here at The Humps is a native cave containing one of the few known relics of the tribes that once roamed the country. Inside can be seen the remnants of a large native drawing, partly defaced unfortunately, while on the roof and walls of the cave are hundreds of hand-marks done in red ochre. This type of cave was used in ceremonial rites and was often held in awe by the lesser members of the tribe. These marks are among the few records which the primitive hunter left to remind us that he once dwelt here. But for a very rare cave of this kind, no trace of the early inhabitants can be found."

This remarkable cave contained several hundred hand paintings. In addition near the entrance was a partly defaced marking, which is shown in Fig. 4. The entrance to the cave was about 3 feet high and 30 feet wide. Actually the whole cave is contained in a huge boulder 81 feet long. The diagrams illustrate the structure of the cave. It is interesting to note that a left hand side tunnel was quite dark and contained no paintings at all.

A rough sampling of hands gave six left hands and two right. Occasionally both right and left would occur together and this was particularly noticed with hands which I suggest are done by the "printing" method. Obviously in the stencil method a right-handed person would find it much easier to use his left hand as the template. The occasional right hands might indicate a certain amount of left-handedness or that some hands are drawn rather than stencilled.

A group of five hands was outlined in white paint while all the rest were worked in red ochre.

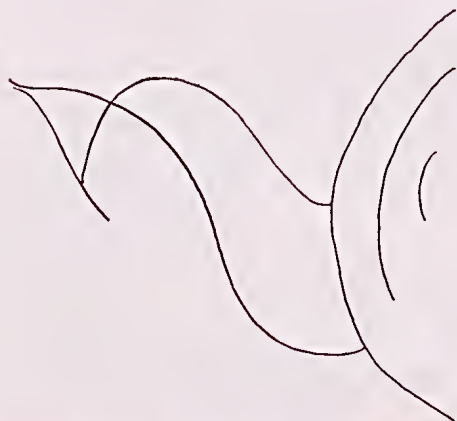


Fig. 4.—Copy of aboriginal marking in the cave at the Humps.

OTHER OCCURRENCES.

Further references to stencilled hands in the southern portion of the State have been recorded. W. D. Campbell in his descriptions of various rock shelters in the Greenough River district (*Journal of the Natural History and Science Society of Western Australia*, vol. 5, 1914, p. 9) indicates that stencilled hands formed a large part of the paintings found. He also refers to stencils of weapons and other objects. His description of the markings in a rock shelter at Sandspring, 23 miles east of Geraldton, seems worth quoting in full:

"The principal paintings are seen at mid-height on the right hand side extending diagonally upwards to the left-hand upper corner of the photograph. These in rotation are as follows: A pair of men's hands with the thumbs touching, and the imperfect paintings of hands below these. About a foot above this line there is a very fresh outline of a tobacco pipe and a womera for throwing spears, while above and between these again are two hands. Near the bottom of the cave are seen the two egg-like figures already alluded to; also the circular shaped marks beyond.

"These paintings are evidently of various ages, but are made in the same way and are similar to those of the aboriginals of the Eastern States. They have been made by placing the hand or article against the rock and dabbing the surrounding surface of the rock with a pigment made of a mixture of white ashes and fat, by means of a green stick the end of which has been bruised into a brush-like tip. This mixture forms a hard cement. The durability of these paintings is increased by the oily nature of the pigment soaking into the sandstone."

A cave at Appertarra near Northampton yielded 12 left hands, 3 womerars and 2 sticks, all in white relief. These were again stencilled.

Willow Gully at the Bowes River gave "eleven right hands, at least three of which are evidently female hands, and twelve left hands, also three pairs of hands; total twenty-nine hands and one right foot. The weapons represented are seven boomerangs, horizontally placed with the curvature of the ends downwards. The paint material is either white clay or white ashes mixed with fat, which I understand is called by the aboriginals 'woolga'. Over these paintings are drawn some line drawings in ochre and red and yellowish ochre . . ." In a cave nearby were "stencilled paintings of three male left hands and a bifurcated figure, which is probably a phallic symbol, and a branching figure. The two latter are painted not stencilled. On the roof there are two male left hands, one right and one left female hands, and on the west side there is one male hand."

Campbell does not say how he recognised female from male but doubtless it was by size. With stencilling, this is a very dubious conclusion to draw as the size of the final picture would depend largely on the method of the artist rather than his or her hand size.

Evidence that some granite rock shelters may have had ceremonial significance is shown by W. D. Campbell. In the same journal (vol. 3, no. 2, 1911, p. 109), he says: "Mr. C. G. Gibson, Assistant Geologist, found a set of six boards in a granite rock shelter at a soak at the foot of a hill about 60 miles north-east of Laverton in October, 1905". The boards referred to are ceremonial ones of religious significance.

GENERAL REMARKS.

Stencilled hands are of fairly general distribution throughout the world and have been recorded in Europe, Asia, North America, Africa and Australia. The most famous, however, are the Aurignacian and Magdalenian of the European Later Palaeolithic, the Australian, and perhaps the African Bushmen. They are of general distribution in Australia and Lindsay Black (*Aboriginal Art Galleries of Western New South Wales*, 1943) gives a number of instances. There is a very well known occurrence in the Victorian Grampians known as the Cave of Hands.

Leonhard Adam (*Primitive Art*, Pelican Edition, 1949, p. 87), refers to them as follows: "In the first or Lower Aurignacian phase there are engravings drawn with the finger on soft clay walls. They are either simple spirals and frets, or crude representations of animals. There are paintings of animals, the crude contours done in black, yellow or red. And there are stencilled silhouettes of human hands, produced by laying the hand on the wall and blowing the colour over it or tracing the outline. Examples of similar stencilled hands are found in the rock art and bark paintings of Australia."

With regard to their purpose R. H. Croll (*Art of the Australian Aboriginal*, 1943), says: ". . . the hands appear to be no more than the rather playful work of a native, or natives, who had



Fig. 5.—The Humps. A flashlight photograph showing one very clear "stencilled" hand and several of the "printed" type. These are all worked in red.

the urge to record something and here found opportunity." A similar attitude is taken by Colin Simpson (*Adam in Ochre*, 1951, p. 207), who says: "The stencilled hands we saw in Arnhem Land caves—and which I have also seen in a New South Wales cave and, which Leonhard Adam points out, were common to the caves of paleolithic Europe—are still a puzzle. Perhaps they mean no more than the 'I-was-here' initials."

However it is possible that the hands had more significance than this. There is the well known reluctance of the native to enter caves or to leave any personal relic lying about for enemies to use in ritual magic. A stencilled hand could be considered such a personal relic. There is also their association with other art forms and the fact that some observers have found such caves frightening to natives. The non-committal attitude recorded by Moore may have been a normal defence reaction when a thing of religious value was endangered by the presence of strangers, too powerful to be driven off.

Among writers who see a more serious purpose in the hands than Croll and Simpson is H. Basedow (*The Australian Aboriginal*, 1925, pp. 321-322). He states: "The Arundta refer to the hand marks as 'ilja imbadja'. A native attaches considerable importance to his identity thus recorded and preserved in some of the caves, believing the brand to stand for his individuality with as much certitude as, say, the European who leaves his card or carves his name in stone or wood. It is compulsory for members of



Fig. 6.—The Humps. Another flashlight showing a group of hands outlined in white.

a certain rank in the Worora tribe to have their 'hand shadows' perpetuated upon the walls of caves in which the bones of their ancestors are reposed, because the spirits of the dead are thus supposed to be apprised of any visits which have been made to their last earthly resting places. It is beyond dispute that the natives possess the faculty of being able to recognise the hand-marks of their relatives and tribesmen, even though they may not have been present when they were made."

However, whatever their significance, it seems worthwhile that all such occurrences should be put on record before vandalism of the type already recorded at Gwambygine and Hyden destroys them for all time.

NOTES ON THE GENUS *IDIOSOMA*, A SUPPOSEDLY RARE WESTERN AUSTRALIAN TRAP-DOOR SPIDER

By BARBARA YORK MAIN, Zoology Department, University of Western Australia.

In 1870 Cambridge described a male specimen of *Idiosoma sigillatum* collected in 1864 from the Swan River, under the name *Idiops sigillatus*. The following year Ausserer proposed for this spider a new genus, *Idiosoma*. No further specimens were collected until 1897 when Pocock described a female of the same species. Later literature on local trap-door spiders intimate the rarity of this spider and report that after 1897 no further specimens were collected. Both described specimens are in the British Museum of Natural History. Prior to this report the genus was thought to be monotypic. The erection of two new species is considered warranted after an examination of Mygalomorph material in the W.A. Museum and additional specimens collected in the field by the author.

In this paper the generic characters are briefly restated, the two new species are described, and the main diagnostic features of *I. sigillatum* given. The variability of *I. hirsutum* sp. nov., *I. nigrum* sp. nov., and *I. sigillatum*, as deduced from a close examination of all available specimens and comparison with Cambridge's and Pocock's original descriptions is fully discussed in a monograph of W.A. Mygalomorphs at present in preparation.

Genus *IDIOSOMA* Ausserer, 1871.

Idiops sigillatus, O.P. Cambridge, P.Z.S., 1870, p. 105, pl. viii, fig. 2.

Acanthodon sigillatum, Simon, Hist. Nat. des Araign. i., 1892, p. 91.

Idiops sigillatus, Rainbow, Rec. Austr. Mus., iv., 1, p. 7.

Acanthodon sigillatum, Rainbow, op. cit.

Generic Characters: *Carapace*, longer than wide, anteriorly and posteriorly truncate, sides subparallel but sinuous; cephalum only slightly elevated. *Fovea*, deep, procurved. *Clypeus*, membranous